The Woman's Page of The Times-Dispatch

The Lady of the Woods

The birch tree, with its silvery white bark and its delicate green leaves, is specially and very closely associated with much that is romantic and traditional in the forest life of America.

The North American Indian has made the birch tree as famous in this country as the palm is in Arabia. The moral laws given in code by the Great Spirit after the flood, and committed to the keeping of wise men among the Indian nation, were believed to have been written upon sheets of birch bark. Not only are many useful domestic vessels and utensils still fashioned out of the bark, but the light and graceful Indian canoe is made from it.

The Blackfoot Indians account by a legend for the black seams and ridges on the white of the birch tree by saying that one day, when the wise Elder Brother of the tribe was going from camp to village, looking after the welfare of his little brothers, a great wind suddenly came up and blew so hard that the Elder Brother could not stand before it. He caught at the weeds and bushes as he flew along, but they all gave way before the strength of the wind. At last he grasped a young birch tree, and although it bent to the wind, it held fast. Elder Brother was blown this way and that, and rolled over and tumbled down, but the tree held firm. At length the wind subsided, and Elder Brother was able to proceed on his way; but before he left he said: "This is a beautiful tree; it has saved me from being blown to pieces. I will put my mark upon it." So he cut characters in the smooth light bark with his stone knife, telling the story of how the birch tree saved the life of Elder Brother.

Katherine M. Beals, writing this and other facts in an exchange, has remembered a German folk-lore tale about the birch, a romance with a beautiful young girl as a heroine. The girl's cruel mistress gave her a quantity of wool to be spun into thread at the end of three days.

The poor girl, who had never learned to spin, despaired of accomplishing her task, and, straying into a wood, sat down under a birch bark tree to weep.

Suddenly a woman clothed in pale green appeared, and inquired why the maiden wept. The woman proclaimed herself the spirit of the birch tree and said that she would help the maiden. She then took her hand and they began to dance. For three days the two danced from sunrise to sunset without any fatigue, stepping so lightly that not even a blade of grass was bent. At the end of the third day they stopped, and the woman, filling the girl's pockets with birch leaves, vanished. When the girl reached home she found the wool all spun and, instead of birch leaves, her pockets were full of gold pieces, which enabled her to escape from her wicked mistress.

Among American poets, Longfellow, in his "Hiawatha," has sung the fame of the birch tree, and Lowell has written an ode to it. It has been transferred to canvas by many great artists, and Dryden, Tennyson and Burns have immortalized it in their verse. It was the special tree of St. John the Baptist, and on the eve of St. John in Russia all the doors are decorated with birch boughs.

At the Cross Roads.

At the cross roads three travelers stood disputing. Said the first: "We must follow the road to the left." But the second cried, "No, let us turn to the right. That is undoubtedly the only way." And the third laughed at them and exclaimed, "How foolish! You are both quite wrong! The road straight ahead of us is the proper one to take." They continued to disagree and at last they parted, each a different way.

But when evening came, to their surprise, they found each other at the selfsame inn.—The Craftsman.

What Vacation Schools Are Doing.

Our present system of public education, thinks a clever writer of an article in the September Craftsman on vacation schools, is wrecked in a foggy sea. We do not know what we want the children taught; we are at a loss what to demand in the way of teaching and of knowledge. We are adrift and uncertain of our bearings.

This much, however, we are coming to believe: that any system of educational training which does not fit the child to face the world, and because of its influence create greater ability to earn daily bread, must go! Gradually, from all systems of education, the useless will be eliminated, the useful kept or duly incorporated. Too long have children grown into manhood and womanhood incapable, and in a passion of resentment realized that while they were expected to earn a livelihood, their education had not prepared them to do so.

Surely the ideal school will be filled with pupils seeking knowledge. When the growing children pass from subject to subject because each succeeding topic of study interests them, because they feel the need of that special knowledge, when they study because they long to know, then we shall have a school that is a power in the community. Give the children what they need. Show them why they need it, and how they may use their knowledge.

We have been teaching children things they did not need to know. That is why they did not want to learn. Offer them what they need, and school houses will overflow with eager thousands, working because they love their work. This is what vacation schools are striving to accomplish.

Put Beauty in Thy Mind.

The advice, "Put money in thy purse," is not to be disregarded by adults, but of far more importance is the counsel that should be given to children: "Put beauty in thy mind." Such coin in the purse of their minds will never be exhausted, lavish spending of it will not impoverish them. Fortified with such genuine treasure, they can roam the whole world over, adding to their store with practiced, well-trained eye, beauty of flower and animal, mountain and ocean, of literature, of art and mankind; nothing that is beautiful will escape.

THREE CHARMING AFTERNOON COSTUMES FOR FIGURED AND PLAIN MATERIALS OF SILK OR WOOL. L'Art de la Mode.

What Parisian Artistes Say

Concerning Skirts.

The constantly recurring rumor that long skirts are to take the place of the more comfortable short ones for the street is soon silenced by the appearance of many new models for street gowns, all with skirts to clear the ground. For the house the long skirt is always the smartest, and, although last winter there were many short house gowns even of the most elaborate order, the fashion never met with general approval and is now passing.

Becoming Trains.

Long trains for the evening are far more becoming and more appropriate for gowns of expensive material. A low-neck dress requires a long skirt if it is to be becoming. A short skirt for the street and a long skirt for the house is a good rule to follow. Two inches from the floor is the correct short skirt length.

Practical Teagowns.

The teagown is practical to wear at home in the afternoon or evening, and will save the street gown and the more elaborate evening gown. The lines of the best teagowns are long and loose, but at the same time a teagown should not be shapeless. A long coat effect is good, provided that the gown itself over which the coat is worn has a belt or girdle. This should be placed high up under the arms to give the empire effect.

Well Worth Their Cost.

Gowns intended entirely for the house, while they are often expensive, will save so much wearing of the street gown or the more expensive afternoon and evening gown that they are well worth the money spent upon them. There is nothing more destructive to the smart tailored suit than wearing it constantly in the house, and the walking dress of to-day is emphatically a walking dress. The tight skirts, when they become mussed and shabby, lose irrevocably the trim appearance which is essential to smartness.

Quality, Not Quantity.

One woman who has made a study of dress and who is given the credit of being extremely well dressed at all times insists that quality rather than quantity is to be considered in selecting the wardrobe. With two tailored gowns, one reception and one evening gown, one teagown, one evening wrap and one raincoat, she maintains that a woman can look smartly gowned for eight months of the year, and also that it is not necessary to have both of the street gowns new each season.

Low-Cut Evening Gown.

The low-cut gown for the evening has so much to recommend it and is so economical that it should be included in the simplest outfit. There is no better investment than a gown simply made, with plain skirt and little train and a waist cut round, V-shaped or collarless, and with elbow sleeves. This can be made of silk-finish cashmere, satin or silk. The two first named wear longest, and this sort of dinner dress does not go out of fashion. It can always be renovated and brought up to date by the trimming on the waist.

Bordered Chiffon and Net.

Bordered chiffon and net are used for this style of gown, and while the handsomest of the bordered materials are expensive, there are a great many different grades to choose from. Sometimes the least expensive ones are the most effective. The combination of coloring in one of the newest models is delightfully odd. The gown of cream satin is trimmed with bands of open-work gold braid, while the tunic is of orange chiffon, with a painted border of gold and black. Apricot and green are also combined.

Piece Trimming.

This is a time when odd pieces of material or really handsome trimming can be used to advantage. The piece of lace, embroidered or spangled, or of spangled passementerie or net, that is put across the top of the waist need have no reference to any other trimming on the gown, and yet this small piece of trimming will give a touch of smartness and color that will entirely transform the whole gown. Remnants of spangled lace or net or of fine hand-painted chiffon can be used as a trimming for the upper part of the skirt or a panel down the front. A tunic overskirt does not require much material, especially if it is to be under another tunic of voile or chiffon, and a white or colored satin gown that has outlived its days of beauty, by the aid of a short remnant of figured material and a coat or tunic of black net or chiffon, can be transformed into an extremely attractive, up-to-date dinner gown.

Mary and Home Economics

In the past, women have known far more about dress materials than they have about foodstuffs. They have learned relative values through experience. They know wearing qualities sometimes. That they know artistic values, that they have an instinctive knowledge of the fitness of things, is certainly a matter for grave doubt after a season of peach-basket hats and the appearance of the sheath gown. Mary must learn the true meaning of the word decoration, that her room, her home, herself may be truly decorated, not desecrated by what she puts on it in color and design. The house, its architecture, its decoration, its use, its design; the house as a home, its purposes, its function, its industries; the care and nutrition of its inmates, its management, the expending of its income, the saving of its resources, all this is what Mary has come to college to learn.

What Horace Greeley Said.

Horace Greeley once said, "Of all horned cattle, deliver me from the college graduate." This was spoken at a time when educators lived in fear of the utilitarian. Now the world demands that modern education shall aim for power, for efficiency, for the ability to do things most needed, and we do no longer apologize for introducing into the curriculum subjects about which the people ought to know.

The Pre-Evolutionary Idea.

There are still too many who cling to the pre-evolutionary idea that no matter how a student eats, nor where he sleeps, nor what he wears, that a book and a class will make a scholar of him. Of all the needs of mankind to-day the greatest is a knowledge of himself, of the means of making the best of himself and of serving his fellowmen efficiently. This is what home economics means to do for Mary. It takes the factors and facts of her education and directly relates them to her, fundamental needs of food clothing and shelter, showing her how to use her education in best obtaining these, and what relation these bear to health, mind and character.

Personnel of Business Girl

The Woman's Home Companion for September has an article in it called "A Practical Talk to the Business Girl," by Anna Steese Richardson.

Some paragraphs regarding the preferred personnel of the business girl are quoted here and say:

If personal characteristics mean so much when girls are employed to serve customers, how much more must they affect the future of a girl who comes directly under the eye of her employer, who, perhaps, shares his office and sits at a desk within six feet of him.

And, after all, girls, your employers, strong, vigorous, business-absorbed male creatures though they are, have feelings, or what we women call "nerves." Your personal habits, your little mannerisms, can annoy an employer to the point of dismissing you—on some other pretext, of course.

So, if you have been out of work for some time, if you never hold a position for any length of time, go not look for office jealousy, pull or politics among your fellow workers, turn the searchlight on yourself, and learn whether some little habit, mannerism, or "trick," of speech, action, or dress does not stand in your way. The process may not be pleasant, but, like a surgical operation, it removes the cause and gets the entire system working rightly once more.

What sort of a voice have you? Do you whine? Do you speak with a nasal twang? Do you punctuate your questions or answers with giggles? Do you enunciate so poorly that persons have to ask you to repeat what you say? Do you suffer with catarrh? Do you use perfume?

You have never thought of this, have you?

Yet many an employer has been driven to dismiss an otherwise competent office worker for a voice that "got on his nerves" or a too free use of cologne or sachet.

Do you bite your nails? Do you slouch in your desk-chair, or stick out one hip and stand in slovenly fashion when you address your employer? Do you wear shoes with heels run down or laces frayed? Does your petticoat show below your tailored skirt? Do you forget to hook skirt and blouse together, covering the union with a neat belt?

Do you tell your troubles to all who will listen, or pretend during working hours that you have no troubles at all? Do you suppress your feelings, or give vent to them? Do you demand recognition and appreciation for all that you do, or do you realize that your work is done for a salary and not for compliments?

Mutual Dependence.

Did you enjoy your breakfast this morning? You were all alone and got it yourself, did you say?

Did you make the Irish linen in your napkin, or were your table furnishings the creations of an idle hour? Did you raise your own coffee? Did the melon grow in your garden or was the beef fattened in your pasture?

The very ends of the earth contributed to your simple meal, and for it you were dependent upon people you had never seen. Your breakfast table was really a clearinghouse for the ends of the earth, so that when you redecorate your dining room and are placing upon the walls the familiar legends, "Let good digestion wait on appetite," and that famous quatrain of Robert Burns:

"Some hae meat but can not eat,
And some would eat that want it,
But we hae meat and we can eat,
So let the Lord be thankit."

You might most appropriately add to these Paul's thrilling confession: "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise."

Prohibitory Conference and Its Natural Results.

A story is told of a mother who, on leaving home for a while, called her children together and, at a prohibitory conference, laid the following injunctions upon them:

"Children, you are not to go upstairs while I am away. But if you do go upstairs, you are not to go into the back room. But if you do go into the back room, you are not to play with the beans filed there. But if you should play with the beans, do not put any into your noses."

There is no need to finish the narrative for any persons who know child life. The physician eventually succeeded in preventing the nasal cavities from becoming vegetable gardens.

The story seems to have been made to order. But it is not at all improbable. Instances are known of kittens having been put into the Baltimore heater and of little pigs having been run through a windmill after thoughtful parents had instructed their children not to do these things.

The Other Side

Under this title a story is told by Anna Burnham Bryant that carries a good lesson. This is the story:

"There's another side," said the minister's wife softly.

How do you know?" asked the visitor who had told the discreditable little tale strictly in conndence, as she herself had learned it in the bosom of the Wednesday afternoon sewing circle. The minister's wife had not been present, and it was only right about this family of newcomers in the parish. "Some things had come to the ears of the sewing circle that were not—well, not exactly ——"

"There's another side," repeated the minister's wife, not so softly this time. In fact, there was a noticeable little ring of indignation in her tone, which died out in a sort of wondering pity as she noticed the challenging look of her caller. "You're glad there's another side, aren't you? Why, of course, you are. And, you see, I know all about it."

"You weren't at the meeting," said the other stiffly. "If you had been, you ——"

"No, I was there—at the house. And I saw—I saw—oh! Mrs. Babbit, if you could have seen what I saw."

"I saw, too, with my own eyes. That daughter of theirs is an opium ——"

"She isn't their daughter—not any relation; not even a friend or a friend's daughter, just a poor girl who had been sick so long and suffered so terribly that the doctors themselves had made her a victim of the opium habit. And they have undertaken to try to cure her. They have given up their home—their very lives—to do it. They don't say a word about it. I just found it out with the help of the doctor."

The visitor rose suddenly, almost unceremoniously. For a moment the hostess looked troubled and aghast. Had she spoken too sharply, discourteously, even? Her mind fled back over the interview as she faltered: "You are not going yet? You, oh! you aren't offended at anything I've said?"

"Yes, I am going. Offended? I? I am going round to see all our ladies, every single one of them!"

"And tell them?" The minister's wife held her breath for the answer.

"And tell them," said the caller gathering her wraps about her, "that beautiful other side."

"Oh!" breathed the minister's wife gratefully, "and tell them, won't you, that there always is another side, always? And it is our Christian business to try and find it."

The Science of Silence.

"You see," said an old man, speaking of a couple of neighbors who lived in perfect harmony in his vicinity, "they'd agreed between themselves that whenever the husband came home a little contrary and out of temper, he wore his hat on the back of his head, and then she never said a word. If she came in a little cross and crooked she threw her shawl over her left shoulder, and then he never said a word.

As it takes two to make a quarrel, either the husband or the wife might often prevent one by stepping out of the room at the nick of time; by endeavoring to divert attention and conversation from the burning question; in a word, by learning to practice on certain occasions the science of silence.

Robert Burton tells of a woman, who, hearing one of her "gossips" complain of her husband's impatience, told her an excellent remedy for it. She gave her a glass of water, which, when he brawled, she should hold in her month.

She did so two or three times with great success, and at length, seeing her neighbor, she thanked her and desired to know the ingredients of the cure. She was informed that it was fair water and nothing more, as silence and not water had wrought the cure.

The Gift of Mondamin.

In a little volume of Indian tales, collected by Mary F. Nixon-Roulet and published by the American Book Company, there is an Ottawa legend that, in these days of "corn clubs" and "corn cultivation," will arouse interest.

The story goes that the Ottawas were driven from their lodges by the Iroquois, but one of their number, a magician called Living Statue, remained behind his people and dwelt upon Manitou Islands. He kept always by his two boys. They paddled his canoe by day and in the night each kept watch by turns, that the Iroquois might not take them by surprise. Each night they would beach the canoe and sleep in the woods.

One day Living Statue arose early and went to hunt. Finding no game, he came to a strange place where he had never been before. As he traversed a broad plain a little man, wearing a red feather on his head, sprang up in front of him.

"Where are you going?" asked Living Statue. "Stay and smoke the peace pipe with me."

They sat and smoked together. Then the little man said to Living Statue:

"You are big and I am small. But my strength is great. Let us wrestle together for a trial of strength. If I fall, say to me: 'I have your strength and mine. I have conquered.'"

They wrestled long, but at last Living Statue threw the little man to the ground and exclaimed: "I have conquered!"

To his surprise, the little man had disappeared, and in the place where he had been lay an ear of corn. It was crooked, and at one end there was a red tassel, so that the ear looked like the little man with the red feather.

Then a queer voice from the ground smote the ear of Living Statue. "Take off my robe," it directed him; "strip it off until only my skin is left. Pull all my body in pieces, break up my bones and scatter them near the wood, and return when the next moon is high in the heavens."

So when autumn came and the first red bloomed on the leaves of the maple, Living Statue went again to the plain. There where he had wrestled with Red Plume was a field of growing corn, every tassel in the wind like a flame of fire.

Then the voice of the little man came to him from the ground in these words: "Your strength was greater than mine. We wrestled, and you overcame me. By your strength you have won this gift for all people."